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Wednesday, February 28, 2018 metro.us | t: MetroPhilly | f: Metro

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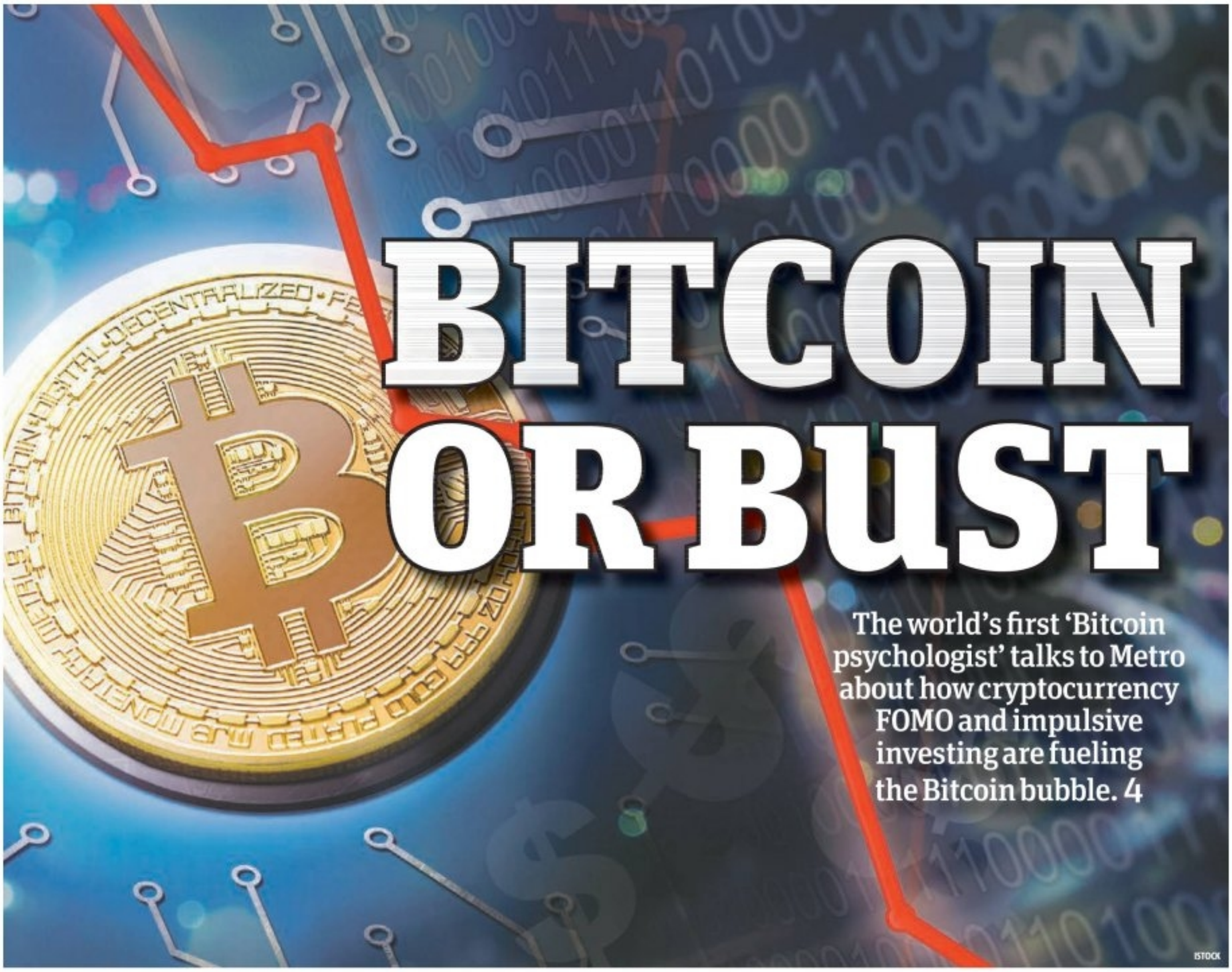
BITCOIN
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WELCOME TO METRO PHILLY

MATT BURKE, SPORTS EDITOR

Baseball is still quite popular in the northeast of the United States, but nationally it can't touch the NFL or NBA in terms of TV viewers and social media buzz. So, how can baseball become more "buzzworthy"? One way is to speed up the game using new rule changes, and we spoke with an NYU professor who wants to get downright radical with it. This is sure to send you baseball traditionalists out there into an uproar. Read more on pages 12-13 and at **metro.us.**

TRUMP SON-IN-LAW LOSES ACCESS TO SECURE INFO

1 President Donald Trump's son-in-law and close adviser, Jared Kushner, has lost access to the most valued U.S. intelligence report, the President's Daily Brief, as the White House imposes greater discipline on access to secrets, two U.S. officials familiar with the matter said on Tuesday. Kushner, who has been operating under an interim security clearance for about a year, had his access to the highly classified briefing cut off in the past few weeks, said the sources. A third official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein recently passed new information to White House Counsel Don McGahn that led to the slowing or stopping of Kushner's pending clearance application. The nature of that information was not clear. It also is unclear if and when Kushner's access to the briefing would be reinstated.

PA MAYOR'S TRIAL HEARS CLOSING ARGUMENTS

2 The long-serving mayor of Pennsylvania's third-most populous city, on trial on charges that he shook down vendors for campaign funds, is a dedicated public servant brought down by corrupt aides, his lawyer told a federal court on Tuesday. But prosecutors portrayed Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski, who took office in 2006 and was re-elected last year while under indictment, as an ambitious manipulator who forced vendors to pay for his plans to make a 2016 run for the Senate. He has pleaded not guilty. "This was a created nightmare for Mayor Pawlowski," said his attorney, Jack McMahon, to assistant U.S. attorneys Anthony Wzorek and Michelle Morgan in District Court in Allentown. But Morgan countered by asking the jurors: "If the people can't believe their leaders are doing their best for the people, what has America become?"

HOLI CELEBRATIONS IN INDIA

3 Students at the National College play with colors to celebrate the Holi festival on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2018, in Lucknow, India.

GETTY IMAGES

ELEVEN PEOPLE ILL AFTER LETTER OPENED AT BASE

4 Eleven people fell ill and three were transported to a hospital on Tuesday after a letter was opened at a U.S. military base in Arlington, Virginia, the fire department and a base spokeswoman said. "Someone opened a letter and everyone at the office started feeling badly," said Leah Rubalcaba, a spokeswoman for Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. The three people taken to a hospital were in stable condition, Arlington Fire Department said on Twitter. The letter was opened in the Marine Corps' portion of the base, which is located near Washington, D.C. "An envelope containing an unknown substance was received" at the base, the Marine Corps said on Twitter. "Personnel in the affected building took immediate preventative measures by evacuating the building," it said.

NEW BILL PENALIZES SITES FOR SEX TRAFFICKING

5 The House of Representatives on Tuesday passed legislation to make it easier to penalize operators of websites that facilitate online sex trafficking, chipping away at a bedrock legal shield for the technology industry. The bill's passage marks one of the most concrete actions in recent years from the Congress to tighten regulation of internet firms, which have drawn heavy scrutiny from lawmakers in both parties over the past year due to an array of concerns regarding the size and influence of their platforms. The measure still needs to pass the Senate, where similar legislation has already gained substantial support, and then be signed by President Donald Trump before it can become law. Speaker Paul Ryan, in a statement before the vote, said the bill would help "put an end to modern-day slavery here in the United States."

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Pastor Hyung Jin Sean Moon wearing a crown that is made of bullets. COURTESY OF SANCTUARY CHURCH

Students will leave area as Pa. church plans AR-15 ceremony

The Scranton-area church denies it is "blessing AR-15s" on Wednesday, weeks after the Florida school shooting.

SAM NEWHOUSE
sam.newhouse@metro.us

Just weeks after a shooter used a modified AR-15 rifle to kill 17 people in a Florida school, a Pennsylvania church is inviting congregants to bring that same model of gun within its walls for a ceremony.

"This is an excellent way to honor the memories of the 17 people who were massacred there," said Tim Elder, director of World Missions at the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary in Newfoundland. "Now more than ever, good people need to stand up and claim the tools with which we can deal with that kind of evil."

The event was planned prior to the shooting in Parkland, Florida, but regardless of the church's intentions, it has attracted national attention. Wallenpaupack Area School District administrators said they will relocate students at a nearby elementary school to a different school on Wednesday.

"Considering the potential numbers of participants to this event, we anticipate that logistical concerns may arise [traffic, parking, etc.]," Superintendent Michael Silsby wrote. "We respect your decision if you choose to keep your children home for the day. Students who are absent next Wednesday will be marked 'excused.' We will have an increased security presence at the South School all next week."

But the church denied widespread reports that they will be "blessing guns."

"The guns are part of the ceremony. Guns don't need to blessed," Elder said.

In an open letter, Pastor Hyung Jin Sean Moon, son of the Unification Church's founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon, said the church invited couples to bring AR-15s to their ceremony as a symbol of the "rod of iron" referenced in the Book of Revelations.

"Contrary to what you have probably read, the Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland is not 'blessing guns,'" Pastor Hyung Jin Sean Moon wrote in an open letter. "On Feb. 28, several hundred couples will gather to (re)dedicate their marriages to each other and, most importantly, to God."

"The scripture tells us that God will shepherd His children with the rod of iron, guarding the flock not as a dictator, but as a loving father," Moon continued. "Ninety-eight percent of mass shootings in the last 60 years have taken place in 'Gun Free Zones.' The idea that passing such laws will protect our sons and daughters is a dangerous and delusional fantasy. You and I are responsible to protect our families, communities and, ultimately, our nation. The 'rod of iron' allows not only strong men, but also women and the elderly to have the ability to protect themselves and others from such predators."

The ceremony has gotten national attention as masses of Americans call out for new laws to prevent shootings like the recent ones in Parkland; Las Vegas; Orlando; Aurora, Colorado; Sutherland Springs, Texas; Roseburg, Oregon; and Newtown, Connecticut.

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Pit bulls, bunnies rescued from abusive Chesco hell hole

Some of the rabbits and a pit bull rescued by from a Chester County home. COURTESY OF THE BRANDYWINE VALLEY SPCA

Animals rescued from a Coatesville home believed to have links to illegal dogfighting are now in recovery, a rescue group said.

Six pit bulls and four rabbits were rescued from the Chester County home, the Brandywine Valley SPCA announced, where police found "dogfighting paraphernalia," including multiple dog treadmills and medical supplies for dogs "affiliated with training and treatment."

"It is beyond comprehension that animals could be forced to suffer like this for entertainment," said BVSPCA Executive Director Adam Lamb in a statement. "We're grateful for the diligence of the State Police in pursuing this case, and we'll support them in every way possible to find justice for these animals and prevent future suffering."

Dowayne Molina, 39, is charged with animal cruelty as well as possession of drugs and a gun after cocaine, marijuana and a handgun were discovered inside his home.

The raid stemmed from a Nov. 12 traffic stop of Molina's car in Avondale by Pennsylvania State Police, who observed a badly injured pit bull in the car, which Molina said was a stray.

The dog had wounds that appeared to be bite marks, according to BVSPCA veterinarians.

The dog, later named Nibbles, was surrendered to the BVSPCA, where her injuries, including "extensive and recent wounds on her face, legs and chest" were identified as consistent with bite marks from potential dogfighting and treated.

That discovery led to an investigation, culminating in the Feb. 21 seizure of animals from Molina's home and his arrest.

Of the animals, the rabbits were in slightly worse condition than the dogs, the BVSPCA said.

"BVSPCA medical staff assessed the dogs to be in fair condition and the rabbits to be in poor condition related to inadequate housing and lack of food and water," they said.

The dogs were seized for the case against Molina, they added.

Nibbles "required two months of medical care, including reconstructive surgeries for her jaw and several surgeries to treat her wounds" to recover, the BVSPCA said.

Nibbles has since been fostered by a BVSPCA technician and is available for adoption.

The BVSPCA is asking animal lovers to donate to help cover the cost and neglected animals. Visit BVSPCA.org to learn more. SAM NEWHOUSE

OPIOID CRISIS

US to seek reimbursement from opioid makers, distributors

The federal government will seek reimbursement from major drug companies and distributors to recover costs it has borne from the opioid epidemic, the U.S. Justice Department said on Tuesday.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Washington would side with states, cities and other plaintiffs in litigation that accuses the drug makers of deceptively marketing opioids and alleges that distributors ignored red flags indicating the painkillers were being diverted for improper uses.

"The hard-working taxpayers of this country deserve to be compensated by any whose illegal activity contributed to these costs," Sessions said.

In 2016, the last year with publicly available data, 42,000 people died from opioid overdoses, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the latest step by the Justice Department to tackle the opioid epidemic, the department said it would file a "statement of interest" in litigation consolidated in a federal court in Cleveland.

Named in the litigation are opioid manufacturers Purdue Pharma LP, Johnson & Johnson, Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd, Endo International PLC and Allergan PLC and the three biggest drug distributors in the country — AmerisourceBergen Corp, Cardinal Health Inc and McKesson Corp.

Representatives for the eight companies did not immediately respond to requests for comment. REUTERS

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Psychological factors are driving the Bitcoin bubble

Do you suffer from cryptocurrency FOMO? The world's first "Bitcoin psychologist" weighs in on the strange new obsession.

SCOTT SIMONE
letters@metro.us

The value of the so-called cryptocurrency market, according to experts, has one intrinsic driver: human psychology.

This psychological factor driving the cryptocurrency market can be broken into two vehicles.

The first is the fear of missing out, colloquially known as FOMO. When the media gleefully and unabashedly profiles 20-somethings who've made hundreds of millions of dollars investing in Bitcoin, people are driven to invest based purely on emotion.

"When something is going up so much, the fear of missing out drives investment—you don't want to miss out on making money," said Swedish psychologist Anne Grefberg, who may very well be the world's first "Bitcoin psychologist." "And of course, people want to avoid that feeling of being the stupid person that didn't do it."

The second is the simple fact that the majority of people — 80 percent, according to Grefberg — think they're smarter than the average person.

"A lot of us feel that we are smarter than most people, and therefore can make better decisions about investments and whatnot," said Grefberg. "But that's not true. If you think about it, most of us are averagely smart and do more decision making with emotions than with our IQ."

At first, Grefberg said, investing in cryptocurrencies "was something people didn't want as much because they didn't understand it."

It's this mystique clouding cryptocurrencies that play on people's psychological yearning to be seen as more intelligent than everyone else, according to Grefberg.

So, the thinking goes, if you can successfully invest in Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, you can prove you're indeed smarter than the average person who stayed away from the market.

The problem, according to Grefberg, is that this type of emotions-based investing will lead to the implosion of the cryptocurrency bubble that has built up.

"For the average person, you can do smarter things than invest in Bitcoin," Grefberg said.

Cryptocurrencies including Bitcoin, Ethereum and Lightcoin have seen unprecedented growth in the past year, despite remaining extremely volatile. GETTY IMAGES

Here are some highlights of the best-known cryptocurrencies:

Bitcoin
Value at start of 2017: $973
Value at the end of 2017: $14,670
Current Value: $9,945
Known for: Extreme volatility, marked by a 40 percent dip between mid-December and January

Litecoin
Value at start of 2017: $4.51
Value at the end of 2017: $232
Current Value: $213
Known for: More stable than Bitcoin; once referred to as the "silver to Bitcoin's gold."

Ethereum
Value at start of 2017: $8
Value at the end of 2017: $756
Current Value: $849
Known for: a market capitalization of $41.4 billion, second after Bitcoin among all cryptocurrencies.

Zcash
Value at start of 2017: $48
Value at the end of 2017: $505
Current Value: $434
Known for: allows for content to be encrypted

Dash
Value at start of 2017: $11
Value at the end of 2017: $1,051
Current Value: $670
Known for: a more secretive version of Bitcoin.

TSA to test new suicide bomber detection tech at Penn Station

The TSA will test technology that can scan for suicide bombs at Penn Station.
GETTY IMAGES

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is now testing a new bomb detection technology at Penn Station meant to help identify suicide vests or other explosives that are strapped onto someone's body.

The initiative begins Tuesday, Sen. Chuck Schumer announced. Schumer pushed for the TSA to test in New York City, he said in a statement, following an attempted subway attack in December.

"At long last and at not a moment too soon, the TSA has agreed to bring this new, potentially life-saving technology to New York City and Penn Station for testing, and so we thank the TSA for heeding the call," Schumer said in a statement.

On Dec. 11, Akayed Ullah, 27, detonated a homemade explosive that was strapped to his body while in a subway tunnel between Port Authority and Times Square. The explosion occurred around 7:20 a.m., and Ullah himself was the only person severely injured.

"The ability to detect concealed explosives worn by cowards looking to do us harm — demands the federal government continue to put both the testing and the perfecting of this technology on the fast-track," Schumer continued. "As the threats we face evolve our preparedness and response must evolve as well to remain a step ahead of evildoers."

This TSA technology, which can help detect suicide vests or other "strapped-to-the-body explosive devices" before they actually detonate, had not been officially tested in New York City before this move.

As someone passes by the device, called "Stand Off Explosive Detection Technology," it can detect the presence of a potential threat by evaluating "naturally occurring emissions from the human body," according to the TSA.

It has previously been used for large-scale events like the Super Bowl, officials said, and in Metro stations in Los Angeles. It has not yet been permanently integrated into transit hubs.

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Residents of Long Island, New York, rallied in August after swastikas were graffitied on a local high school. EVAN R. BERNSTEIN VIA TWITTER/@BERNSTEIN_EVAN

New report: 2017 brought increase in anti-Semitic incidents

Overall, the United States saw a 57 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents from 2016 to 2017, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

KRISTIN TOUSSAINT
kristin.toussaint@metro.us

Anti-Semitic incidents escalated in 2017, according to a new report by the Anti-Defamation League, surging nearly 60 percent nationwide.

This is the largest single-year increase on record since the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) began tracking data on anti-Semitic incidents in the 1970s, the organization said when it released its annual report on Tuesday.

"The dramatic increase in harassment, school-related incidents and against religious institutions cannot be accepted as a 'new normal.' This kind of hate hurts the victim and deeply impacts the Jewish community; we must remain vigilant in denouncing and exposing hate wherever it emerges," said Evan R. Bernstein, ADL New York regional director, in a statement.

New York had more incidents than any other state, but it wasn't alone in experiencing an increase in anti-Semitism. At least one incident was reported in all 50 states in 2017 — an occurrence that hasn't happened in at least a decade, according to the ADL.

The states with the most reports of incidents were New York (380 reports), California (268), New Jersey (208), Massachusetts (177), Florida (98) and Pennsylvania (96).

Nationwide, the ADL received reports on 1,015 incidents of harassment (including 163 bomb threats against Jewish institutions), a 41 percent jump from the year before; 952 incidents of vandalism, an 86 percent increase from 2016; and 19 physical assaults, which was a 47 percent decrease from the prior year.

Schools and college campuses were the settings for a big increase in this anti-Semitism. In Massachusetts, there was an 86 percent surge in anti-Semitic incidents occurring in schools, with 93 incidents reported in 2017. In 2016, 50 incidents were reported in Massachusetts schools.

Across the country, reports in schools nearly doubled in 2017, for the second year in a row.

Jonathan A. Greenblatt, ADL CEO and national director, said in a statement that the surge in attacks in 2017 — from schoolchildren harassed to cemetery desecrations to white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia — happened alongside an "emboldening of hate groups" and a widening divide of groups in our society.

After hearing more concerns about anti-Semitism spreading in 2016, the ADL did step up its frequency of reporting to share data more often throughout the year. People are reporting more often to the ADL than ever before, the organization said.

The ADL is responding to this surge in reports with anti-bias education programs and collaborations with law enforcement, training 15,000 law enforcement officials per year.

"Anti-Semitism may be the oldest hatred," Greenblatt said in a statement, "but it is deeply felt today and we will never give up on our important work to ensure our communities are safe for each and every one."

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Republicans in Congress reject new limitations on guns

As the U.S. Congress has failed to tighten gun laws in the wake of other mass shootings, states have taken action on their own. GETTY IMAGES

Republican leaders of the U.S. Congress said on Tuesday that they would not raise the minimum age for gun buyers, in a sign that one of President Donald Trump's proposals likely will not get far on Capitol Hill after a deadly Florida school shooting.

The second-deadliest shooting at a U.S. public school has reignited the long-running national debate over gun rights, pitting many of the students who survived the Feb. 14 high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, against powerful gun rights groups like the National Rifle Association.

Several of those students visited lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Tuesday to press Congress to enact new restrictions on gun ownership.

Republicans in Congress have rejected those efforts after similar mass shootings in the past, and party leaders said they were not likely to act this time, either.

"We shouldn't be banning guns from law-abiding citizens. We should be focusing on making sure that citizens who should not get guns in the first place don't get those guns," House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan told a news conference.

Trump has suggested arming teachers and raising the minimum age to buy semiautomatic rifles from 18 to 21, but Ryan said Congress was not likely to act on either idea.

Local governments, not Congress, should decide whether to arm teachers, he said.

Trump still supports raising the age limit and will release specific policy proposals this week, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said.

Ryan's comments made it clear that more aggressive gun limits, like a ban on the military-style rifle used by the 19-year-old Parkland shooter, were unlikely to gain traction in Congress.

Ryan met later in the day with Parkland students, who pushed for a ban on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, as well as other school-safety features, according to Rep. Ted Deutch, a Democrat who represents the district.

"This isn't the last time they they're going to come to Washington," Deutch said. "It's really just the beginning of that effort."

Prosecutors have said that Nikolas Cruz killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland with a legally purchased rifle. Federal and local law enforcement agencies have acknowledged receiving multiple warnings about Cruz's potential for violence.

Trump and his fellow Republicans are under pressure to act following the massacre, but they also must avoid angering Republican voters who broadly support gun rights as well as interest groups like the NRA, which spent $55 million in the 2016 election.

The House voted in December to bolster the national background check system after the Air Force failed to provide records that could have flagged a former service member who killed 26 people at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in November.

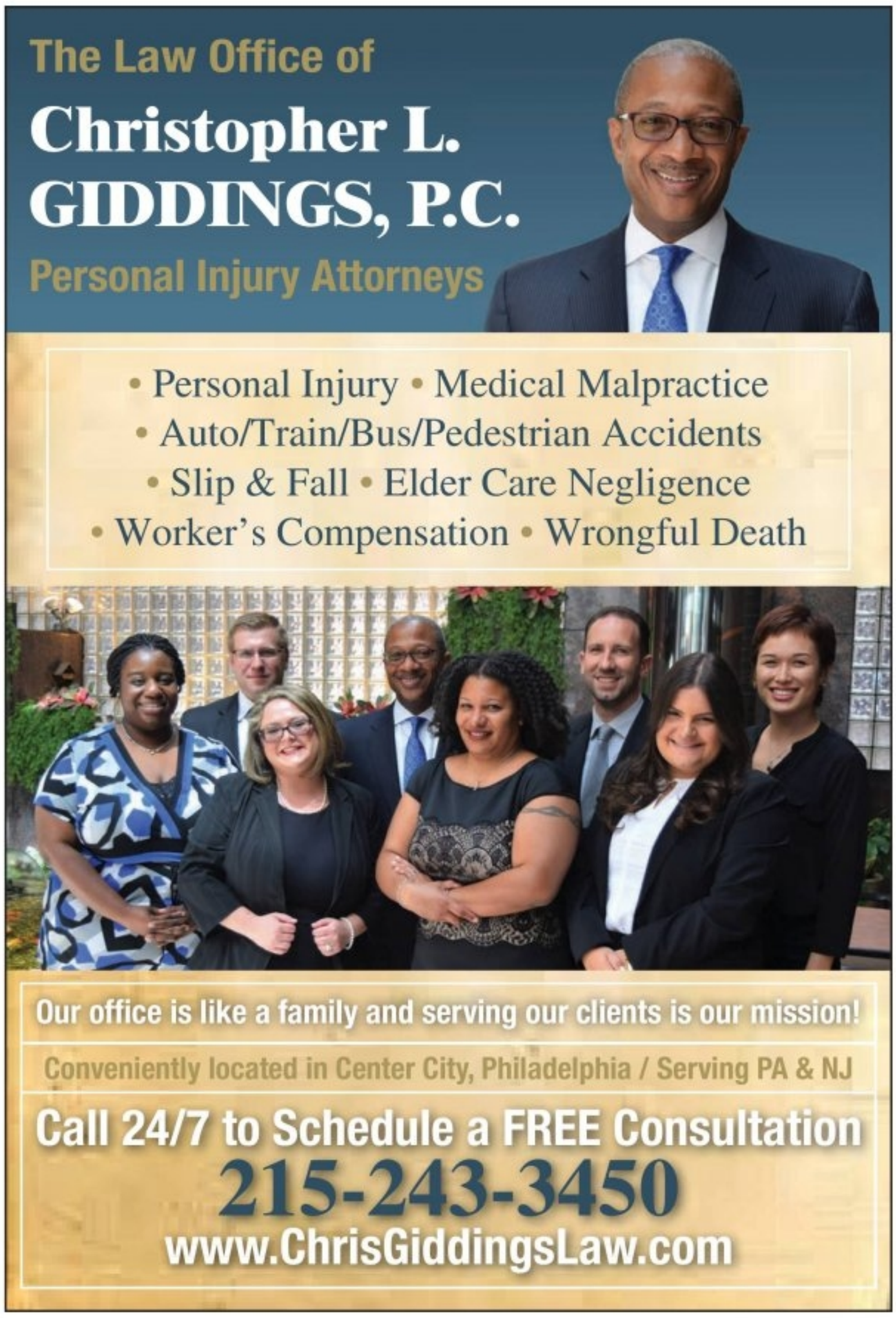
That legislation has broad support in the Senate as well, and Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Senate Republican, said he wants a vote to take place this week.

Senate Democratic leader Charles Schumer said that by itself would not be adequate. He called for Congress to expand the background check system to cover all gun sales, including those conducted at gun shows and over the internet.

That legislation has failed in Congress twice over the past five years, and it fell short again in the House on Tuesday as Republicans rejected an effort by Democrats to bring it up for a vote.

"We Democrats, at a minimum, believe we should be passing a universal background check legislation that assures that guns don't fall into the wrong hands," Schumer told reporters.

REUTERS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Delta Airlines is one of the companies announcing it will cut ties with the NRA. GETTY IMAGES

These companies are ending their relationships with the NRA

Several are cutting ties with the gun-rights organization in wake of pressure from social media users.

LENYON WHITAKER
lenyon.whitaker@metro.us

In the wake of the recent mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, survivors and customers have been urging large corporations to end NRA-membership benefits and discounts.

Rental-car companies and airlines are among the large marketers that have severed ties with the NRA after being hit with criticism after the massacre, which left 17 dead.

The news site Think Progress posted a list of companies that offer special NRA membership discounts to customers. Shortly after, activists, customers and others affected by gun violence began spreading the names of companies on social media. An online movement was created using the hashtag #BoyottNRA and customers began threatening to boycott these companies.

Many large corporations support the NRA by offering discounts to members of the organization including life insurance, travel deals to prescription medication.

Most of these companies released statements and posted messages to Twitter to inform their customers.

Here are the statements from some of their statements.

First National Bank of Omaha
The company tweeted: "Customer feedback has caused us to review our relationship with the NRA. As a result, First National Bank of Omaha will not renew its contract with the National Rifle Association to issue the NRA Visa Card."

Enterprise Rent-A-Car
In a response to a Twitter user, the company tweeted: "Thank you for contacting us! All three of our brands have ended the discount for NRA members. This change will be effective March 26. Thank you again for reaching out. Kind regards, Michael"

Delta
"Delta is reaching out to the NRA to let them know we will be ending their contract for discounted rates through our group travel program. We will be requesting that the NRA remove our information from their website."

United Airlines
"United is notifying the NRA that we will no longer offer a discounted rate to their annual meeting and we are asking that the NRA remove our information from their website."

Hertz
"We have notified the NRA that we are ending the NRA's rental car discount program with Hertz."

Allied Van Lines
"Allied Van Lines no longer has an affiliate relationship with the NRA effective immediately. We have asked them to remove our listing from their benefits site."

MetLife
"We value all our customers but have decided to end our discount program with the NRA."

A notable exception is FedEx. The delivery service has said it has no plans to disassociate itself from the NRA.

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Obama's photographer had a savage response to President Trump's 'run in' comments

President Trump has said he would have "run in" unarmed to the scene of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting. GETTY IMAGES

The Obama administration's former White House photographer has stepped up his insult game.

Pete Souza's Instagram account has become popular for the subtle and not-so-subtle shade he throws President Trump's way, calling out Trump's gaffes and unstatesmanlike moments with more dignified equivalents from the Obama years. But sometimes when Trump goes low, Souza meets him there.

The day after Trump said he would have "run in" unarmed to the scene of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting — implying that the school's security guard was cowardly for not doing so — Souza posted a photo of Obama bounding up a set of stairs to make a speech, with the caption, "Back in the day when our President could run."

Trump's comment was criticized as both insensitive and inaccurate, as his history of self-serving behavior doesn't lend itself to the concept of running toward gunfire, and he is an avowed opponent of physical activity. As an example of the former, several people on social media shared a photo of Trump monopolizing an umbrella on his way up the stairs to Air Force One, while his 10-year-old son, Barron, followed behind, unshielded from the rain.

Trump made his comments during a meeting of governors at the White House on Monday, saying "you don't know until you test it" but he believed he would have rushed into the school "even if I didn't have a weapon, and I think most of the people in this room would have done that, too." He had previously said local law enforcement's response to the shooting was "frankly, disgusting."

In the White House press briefing later on Monday, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders walked back Trump's "run in" comment, saying that he didn't mean he would run into a school with an active shooter but would "be a leader."

On the day after the Parkland massacre, Souza shared a photo of Obama hugging former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who survived a mass shooting at a constituent event in 2011 and now advocates for gun control. "She knows what it's like to be shot in the head by someone with a gun," wrote Souza. MICHAEL MARTIN

BORDER WALL

Judge rejects lawsuit seeking to stop Trump border wall

A U.S. judge on Tuesday sided with President Donald Trump's administration and rejected an attempt by the state of California and environmental groups to stop the government from building a wall on the U.S. border with Mexico.

The lawsuit filed in a San Diego federal court alleged that Trump's proposed wall violates federal environmental standards, as well as constitutional provisions regarding the separation of powers and states' rights.

The plaintiffs asked U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel to stop the administration from building the wall until it demonstrates compliance with environmental laws.

In a ruling on Tuesday, Curiel said his decision was not based on whether the underlying decisions to construct the wall "are politically wise or prudent."

Rather, Curiel said the Trump administration had not exceeded its legal authority in pursuing the project.

Representatives for California Attorney General Xavier Becerra could not immediately be reached for comment.

Trump accused Curiel of bias during the 2016 presidential campaign based on the Indiana-born judge's Mexican ancestry. At the time, Curiel had been overseeing a separate lawsuit involving Trump University. REUTERS

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Speeding up the slow game of baseball

Professor Steven Brams on how to make the game of baseball more appealing to young people.

MATT BURKE
matthew.burke@metro.us

Fans chat during a game at Citizens Bank Park last season. GETTY IMAGES

"This is about modifying the game so that the team behind always has a chance to catch up, but it will also lead to changes in strategy."

NYU professor Steven Brams

The NFL is still far and away the most popular pro sports league in North America, based on TV ratings. The NBA is the most popular American sports league among millennials, according to a 2015 Washington Post piece.

Major League Baseball, meanwhile, cannot sniff the TV ratings of the NFL, and even loses out to the NBA in national TV ratings when comparing the 2017 NBA Finals and 2017 World Series. The general narrative among the key demos in America today is that baseball is "old," "boring," "slow," and that it desperately needs some sort of turbo boost in order to save itself from losing out on an entire generation of fans.

NYU professor of politics and American game theorist Steven Brams is one of many who believes the way to entice younger audiences to embrace baseball is through rule changes, though Brams' ideas are some of the more radical to have been heard.

"Baseball is falling far behind football and basketball, and most of it is due to fans losing interest during long games and blowouts," Brams told Metro while discussing his paper on the topic that was published in the current issue of SIAM Review (produced by Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics). "Making games more competitive and making games quicker should be the first priority for [MLB] right now."

Time crunch

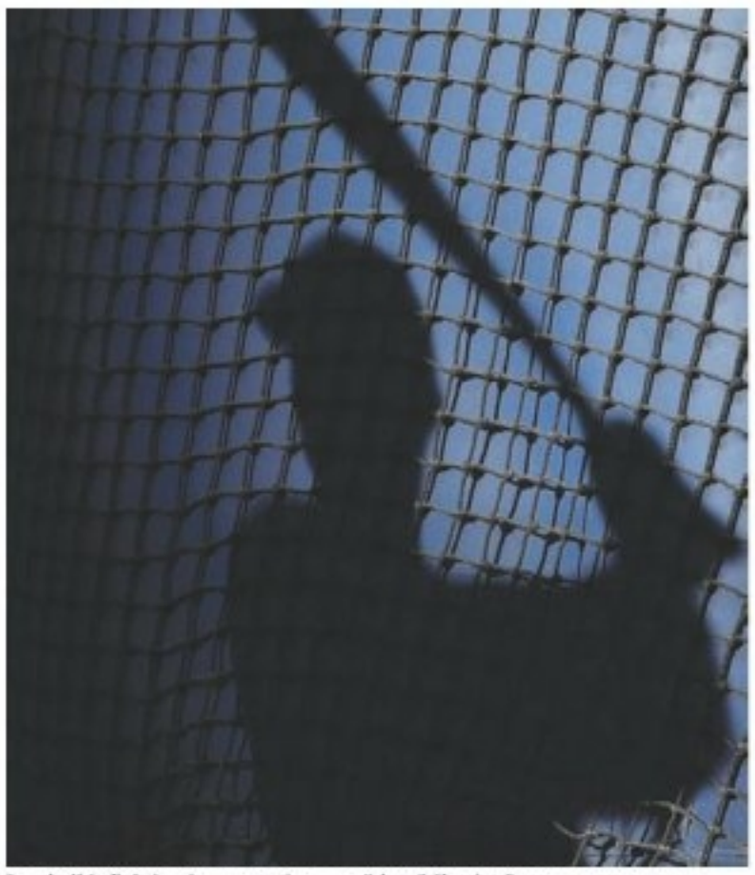
Despite recent efforts to speed up the game, the average time of a nine-inning MLB game last season actually climbed four and a half minutes from the year prior. The average baseball game in 2017 was three hours, five minutes and 11 seconds — a new MLB record. When you factor in that each baseball team plays 162 games, that's quite the commitment if you're a fan of any one of these teams. In fact, if a fan was to watch every single pitch of his favorite team's regular season games in 2017, he or she would have needed 20.8 full days (or 29,970 minutes) to complete the mission.

In a world where you're lucky to get a Millennials' attention for three minutes, let alone three hours – it's clear that baseball needs to do something.

Brams' most radical idea is to have regular season games "handicapped" with a so-called, "catch-up rule." His proposed change would include making teams that are ahead in score retire after two outs at bat instead of three. If a team goes ahead during an inning, and already has two outs, it would have to retire immediately.

"You wouldn't see nearly as many blowouts with this rule," Brams told Metro. "This is about modifying the game so that the team behind always has a chance to catch up, but it will also lead to changes in strategy."

No sport in North America is so in love with its own traditions as baseball, so a proposed change this drastic would



Baseball is fighting its reputation as a "slow," "boring" game. GETTY IMAGES

be met with sure furor from the baseball community. A giant issue baseball fans would have here is that the rule could diminish the truly great teams in the sport and could water it down as a whole. The best teams — which typically build leads early in a game for a reason — would be essentially punished for being so good.

"Yes, the great teams would not like this but it encourages more competition. It's a trade-off," Brams told Metro. "Fans become uninterested very quickly during a blowout, particularly in baseball. We've studied the times of baseball games for the past 50 years and we think using the 'catch-up rule' would cut games down by 20 minutes at least and would get it much closer to the NFL and NBA — which are the two most popular sports by far in America."

20.8

It would take nearly 21 full days for a person to watch every pitch of his or her favorite team's full regular season. Conversely, it would take a weekend (56 hours) to watch every snap of your favorite NFL team's regular season.

Pain delay

Relatively new MLB commissioner Rob Manfred has pushed to tinker with the game's rules to speed things up, but to no avail thus far. The MLBPA (Major League Baseball Players' Association) has stalled Manfred's attempt to introduce a pitch clock and a proposal that would have put a runner on second base to start the 10th inning of spring training games fell through last week.

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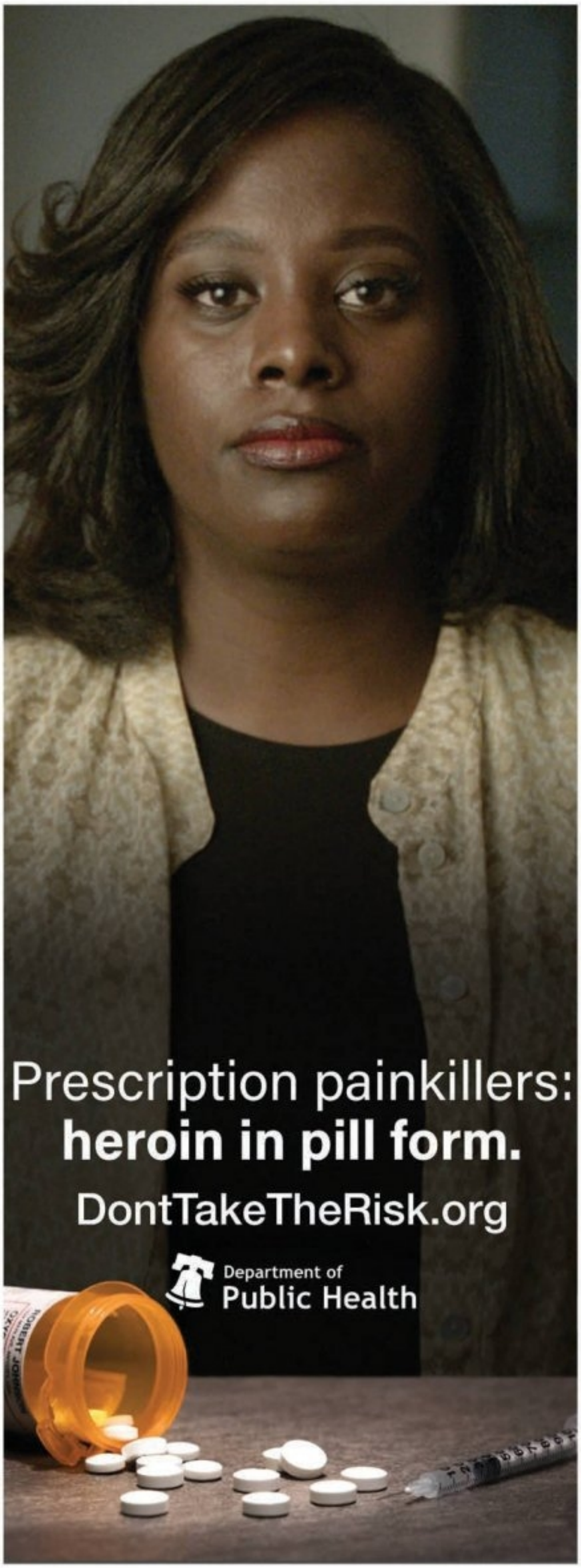

"The Looming Tower" debuts Feb. 28. HULU

Adapting the unadaptable

Jeff Daniels and Peter Sarsgaard talk their epic new series, "The Looming Tower."

GREGORY WAKEMAN
Gregory.Wakeman@metro.us

Lawrence Wright's Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Looming Tower" is arguably the definition of unfilmable. The novel meticulously tells the story of the build-up to 9/11 — particularly how the FBI and CIA's lack of cooperation prevented them from uncovering the terrorist plot in time.

And while there's no way a Hollywood studio would go near such a complex book, Hulu immediately saw the appeal and took on the challenge. The result is the series, "The Looming Tower," out Feb. 28. Ahead of the premiere, we chatted with stars Jeff Daniels and Peter Sarsgaard about tackling the novel and more.

What originally attracted you to "The Looming Tower"?

Peter Sarsgaard: I had read it. I was like, 'How in the world are they going to adapt this book?' Because it spans so many years and cultures.

Jeff Daniels: It shows you what led to 9/11, at least on this side of the ocean. And if a screenwriter had made it up, they would tell you, "Sorry, you have to change that. It's implausible." What stunned me after all these years [was] that I didn't know parts of this story.

PS: It also wrestled with important stuff that we're still dealing with today. Because people in the CIA at that time said, "If we bomb these 12 places on this given day. We'll get Osama Bin Laden." Then they were asked, "How many civilians would die?" And they were like, "5,000 or so." The Clinton administration said no. But I know there are people in this country that believe, "Better 5,000 of them than 4,000 of us." That's the nature of the country we live in. You either believe that American lives are more important than other, or that a life is a life.

GETTY

Do you think that, particularly with this streaming adaptation, television has surpassed movies in quality?

JD: Television is where the writers went. They're given a creative freedom that I haven't felt in other places. Then they hire really good people and they give you the money to shoot it. That production value is all across "The Looming Tower." Because it is not a cheap show to shoot. We are in 5 or 6 different countries.

PS: TV is more interesting.

JD: You feel like what's the difference between this and movies? You're trusted. And there's a smart audience out there. All those people that like reading books, they don't mind bingeing and seeing a 10-episode season of "The Looming Tower." It is like reading a novel.

Do you think you could binge watch "The Looming Tower"?

JD: I work in television. I work in movies. I don't necessarily watch any of it. Which is a failing I'm sure. I sit with people and they say, "Did you see this film? Or that TV show?" And I am like, "No. I was too busy watching a baseball game."

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March's must-see TV series

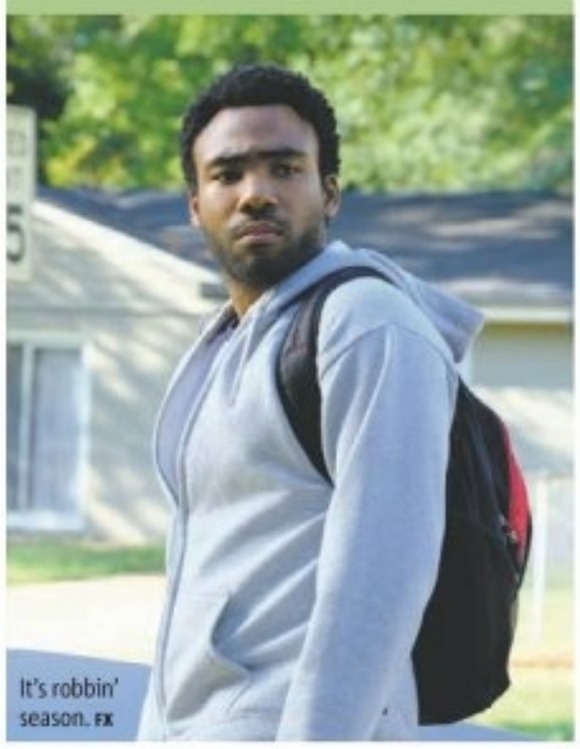
Just like that, it's almost March. Spring is in the air (thanks, global warming!) and there's a slew of series coming to the small screen. Here are the ones you can't miss.

RACHAEL VAUGHAN CLEMMONS

"Atlanta"

We could spend all day waxing poetic about the pleasures of watching "Atlanta," but suffice it to say, the long-awaited second season (hereby known as "Atlanta: Robbin' Season") is more of the same, but better. It's funny, real and nuanced AF. After this season, there's no denying that "Atlanta" is one of the greats.

"Atlanta" premieres March 1 on FX.



It's robbin' season. FX

Literally the end of the world, as these two know it. HULU

"Hard Sun"

Postapocalyptic fare has recently been all the rage — but "Hard Sun" takes a hard look at a world of criminals before a world-ending natural disaster strikes. At its center are two officers: one, committed and corrupt and played by Jim Sturgess; the other damaged and incorruptible and played by Agyness Deyn. What's your bet these two cops will put their well-deserved distrust of each other aside just in time for the end of the world?

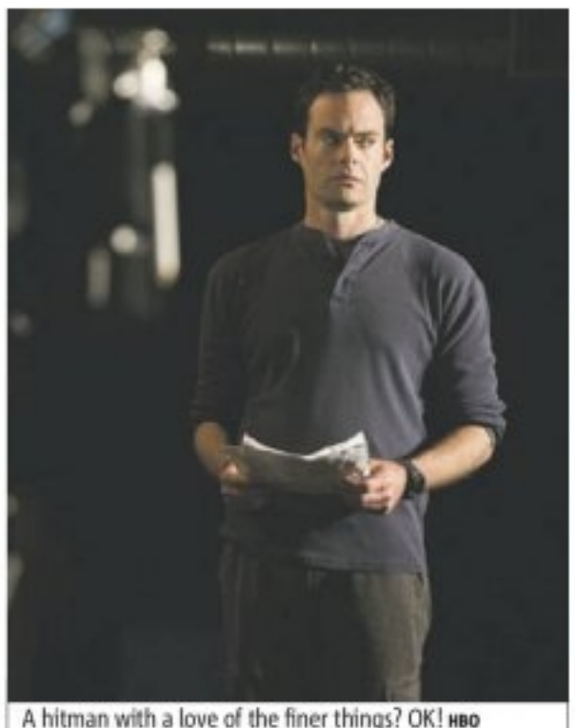
"Hard Sun" premieres March 7 on Hulu.

"Jessica Jones"

As one of Netflix's early entries into the small screen world of Marvel, the first season of "Jessica Jones" was major. And even though it's been a few years, the hard-drinking, super-powered P.I. is still near and dear to our hearts. And good thing: In the second season, Jessica (a marvelous Krysten Ritter) is still dealing with the fallout of Kilgrave, and there's more about her past and her powers popping up, too. But don't worry — she's still kicking ass along the way. Even when she knows better.

"Jessica Jones" premieres March 8 on Netflix.

Your fave hard-drinking PI is back, baby. NETFLIX



A hitman with a love of the finer things? OK! HBO

"Barry"

A show about a hitman who wants to become a theater actor? With the hitman gloriously played by Bill Hader? Yes, please. This HBO series promises to please, toeing the line between comedy and action like it's, oh, 1997 or so. Count us all the way in.

"Barry" premieres March 25 on HBO.

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Willem Dafoe: *'I don't know anyone who likes Donald Trump'*

The actor is nominated for an Oscar in the Best Supporting Actor category for "The Florida Project."

PAULO PORTUGAL
MWN
letters@metro.us

He has the voice, he has the looks, he has the energy. He has that chameleonic ability to become anything on the screen. But still, there's something unique and very personal that brings truth to his characters, that makes us like him – even when he's a villain.

On Willem Dafoe's IMDb page, we can find 122 credits. Some of them are still in different stages of production, others where he only used his voice, be it animations or videogames, some in small parts, but most of them are just great performances.

He went from Christ to Antichrist, drug dealer to caretaker, superhero to war hero…But in one of his most recent roles, he's just a kind manager of The Magic Castle Motel in Sean Bakers' "The Florida Project."

We chatted with the 62-year-old to know more.

I have to say you look very much like Vincent Van Gogh...

[Laughs] I have to say when I finished shooting ("At Eternity's Gate") I had less beard and redder hair. But let me tell you a funny story. I looked more like him before. But after the shooting I shaved, but half an hour later somebody called me and said he had a project. And he said: "Whatever you do, don't shave your beard!" [Laughs] So, I'm growing it now for this new project.

What was it like to play Van Gogh?

It was beautiful. The director is Julian Schnabel and he's a great painter. The movie deals a lot with nature. It's not a biopic. It's towards the end of his life. We shot in Saint Remy, Arles, in Paris. Beautiful locations. Some of it is in English, some in French.

How do you go from Schnabel and Baker, to Edward Norton with the film you're doing now, "Motherless Brooklyn?"

With every movie, your job is different, you know? The story is different, your role is different, the life, the society of the movie is different. Even when you're inside of it you don't notice those differences. I try to be practical and try to find my way, to be fully engaged.

Willem Dafoe is nominated for an Academy Award for his role in "The Florida Project." A24

You worked with several directors: Martin Scorsese, Lars Von Trier, David Lynch, Abel Ferrara... What's the difference on the approach?

Well, you work differently with everyone. As I get older, I want to be the creature of the director. If the director is an older director and has more experience that's a little easier to do, but if he's a young director, he might be a little too respectful to the actor. And it's a little struggle. So, you have to give yourself to them, but also help them. But it's all personal, all depends on the personalities involved.

Are you very critical with yourself?

I am. I think I am. I wish I wasn't. Because I'm an ambitious person. I'm serious about what I do. Because when it goes well it's a very powerful thing. And I'm not talking about performing only. I'm talking about movies. They are very important, I think. They can change how people live.

How much do you get involved while filming?

With all the pretending, there are triggers that allow you to feel like someone else.

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This teddy bear is a *world traveler*

Meet your newest Instagram obsession. MWN

ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED

All over the world, it is very common to see your friends posting shots featuring their travels on social media. However, a small teddy bear has become the new sensation of Instagram by posing in front of the camera on his travels, instead. Young travelers Dorien (20) and her brother (27) started the project as a joke on the Instagram handle @teddybearabroad, but now this little toy makes its many followers very happy.

Tell us about @teddybearabroad.
It started as a joke. I've had this teddy bear since I was very small. Back then, I already always took him with me during holidays and that just went on when I was older. When my brother went on holiday on his own for the first time – to Iceland – he took him with him as well. Now that we make our own journeys, we continue to take him with us. That means that he's on holiday four times a year.

How did you come up with an Instagram page?
My brother made a funny photo of the bear in an Icelandic landscape. I showed it to my colleagues and they were laughing loudly. After that, I regularly forwarded photos to people. Last summer I was in Malta and Tenerife and when I was selecting the photos, I saw that many of them were funny. Friends encouraged me to create an Instagram page.

I thought: Am I really going to create an Instagram page for a cuddly bear? But I did, and tried to post something twice a week.

Do you have many followers?
Almost 3500 now. Especially in the beginning, the page quickly became more and more popular.

Many followers are from Germany and Austria, because the largest part of my photos are taken there. People become happy because of my photos, it gives them a 'good vibe'. That's exactly the goal of my posts.

Which Instagram accounts do you follow yourself?
Pages such as @gypsea_lust and @doyoutravel. They always post beautiful photos. And I follow the official account of National Geographic.

Where else are we going to see @teddybearabroad?
We have already taken many photos in countries and islands all over Europe, but I want to take him outside of Europe as well. High on my wish list are: Thailand, Vietnam, New Zealand, Cuba and South Africa.

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West Philadelphia Orchestra gears up for Purim Party 2018

The West Philadelphia Orchestra knows how to make a crowd dance. ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED

Bust out those dancing shoes for a night of klezmer meets Busta Rhymes.

JENNIFER LOGUE
jennifer.logue@metro.us

Don't have plans for Purim 2018 yet? Then you should mark your calendar for West Philadelphia Orchestra's (WPO) Purim Party at World Cafe Live on Thursday, March 1.

Kicking off at 8 p.m., the night will be filled with music, dancing and World Cafe Live's extensive menu of beer, wine, cocktails and bites.

"We've thrown Purim parties before in various contexts," says Larry Goldfinger, clarinetist for WPO. "Once or twice we played a huge Purim party at Zahav restaurant, we've played Purim parties at Jewish community centers and the for past two years we've had our Purim parties wrapped into our weekly Tuesday Balkan Dance Party at Franky Bradley's. So it's something we've tried to do every year."

Not Jewish? Not a problem, because Purim parties welcome everyone to dance the night away.

"Purim is about celebration, community, and is meant to transcend religious boundaries," Goldfinger says. "It's technically an atheistic holiday, as far as the liturgy is concerned. It's just based on a story about an ancient event. Klezmer bands in Hungary used to go all over town, from house to house, with the whole community following — Jews and non-Jews alike — all night on Purim. We pride ourselves on creating a celebratory atmosphere wherever we go, and our music comes from both secular and Jewish traditions."

In case you're not familiar, klezmer is a type of music that originated with the Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe. It's

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Susan Watz is a Philly klezmer legend.

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celebratory in nature and the name comes from two Hebrew words: "*kley*," which means vessel and "*zemer*," which means melody. According to Goldfinger, there will be plenty of it to enjoy along with some modern mashups.

"On Thursday we'll be playing a traditional klezmer style specifically to facilitate traditional dancing — those whirling rings of humanity united hand in hand," he says. "We'll still play our weird mashup versions of klezmer tunes, like 'The Rabbi's Dance' combined with 'Woo Hah (Got You All in Check),' so our fans who come expecting to get their booty shake on won't be disappointed either. We also have some original songs for the occasion, including a Yiddish drinking song specifically for Purim."

The evening will feature two sets: one from Philly Klezmer All-Stars and one from WPO, and each will last about an hour. Two featured klezmer artists for the party are Susan Watz and Dan Blacksberg.

"Philly's klezmer legacy is way bigger than most people recognize and no one embodies that legacy more than trumpeter Susan Watz. Her grandfather's xylophone graced many hit klezmer records from the '20s and '30s, and her mother was the fantastic drummer, Elaine-Hoffman Watts, who passed away last year. Susan's trumpet sound captures another time, feeling and dimension, and it is wondrous to hear," Goldfinger notes.

"Trombonist Dan Blacksberg is a younger generation klezmer musician who tours the world playing and teaching klezmer. Dan knows the tradition inside out, but he's also been involved in some of the most innovative Jewish music projects of the last 10 years," Goldfinger adds.

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Made In Cookware is a home cook's new best friend.

JENNIFER LOGUE
jennifer.logue@metro.us

Everyone seems to be a foodie these days: eating at the buzziest new restaurants, shopping at the most obscure farmers markets and scouring the internet for exciting, new recipes to try out at home.

But if you're like most millennials, you're probably cooking on some beat up pots and pans you've had since college.

Made In Cookware's founders, Bradford "Chip" Malt and Jonathan "Jake" Kalick, decided to change all that.

With Malt's background in science, tech and e-commerce and Kalick's background in the food industry, the dynamic duo seemed destined to launch Made in Cookware together.

"My family wholesales cookware. For five years I was running the business that outfits everything for hotels, restaurants and casinos across the United States," says Kalick.

"I was running e-commerce for an apparel company in NYC called Rhone," adds Malt.

Essentially, the business model is a lot like most direct-to-consumer ventures out there, like Casper for your mattresses and Brooklinen for your sheets. However, Made in Cookware has one difference.

"We are very different from a lot of direct-to-consumer companies because we control the entire supply chain," Kalick says. "We go out and buy the nonstick coating, the aluminum for the middle of the pan, the stainless steel for the interior part of the pan. We source that and send it to our factory that creates the cookware."

This means consumers can save a lot of money.

"Let's say it costs $10 for a product to come out of the factory," explains Malt. "The cost usually gets doubled from the factory to the wholesaler and then doubled again from the wholesaler to retailer. We're able to cut that entire middle segment, so we don't have that jump."

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And how about the quality of the pans? A lot of care went into their design process.

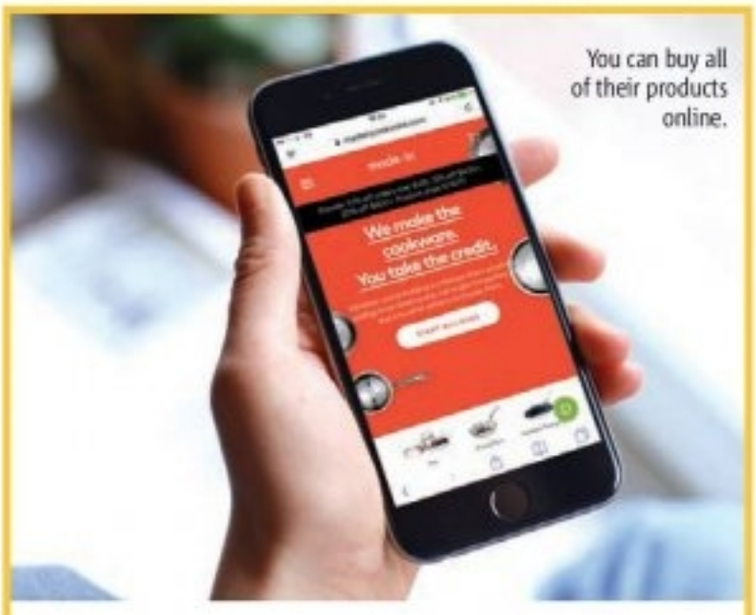
"Before we started, we interviewed 100 home chefs and asked them what they liked and didn't like about their cookware," Kalick reveals. "One thing that came up is that a lot of the premium competitor handles get extremely hot. So we designed a handle that's hollow in the interior, dissipating heat so you won't get burned."

The pots and pans are also ergonomic and stackable, for those of us with limited cabinet space in cramped city apartments.

What's more, if you have a fancy induction stove, Made In Cookware is designed for those as well.

"The induction burners are magnetic instead of electric or gas. There's a nickel content in our pots and pans that allow them to be induction compatible," Malt explains.

For more information, visit: madeincookware.com.



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Spring training for unknown Phils' prospects offers hope, validation

The Phillies are hoping to inspire a new generation of prospects in training camp.

EVAN MACY
evan.macy@metro.us

Frankyn Kilome's fiery fastball could make him one of the team's top relievers one day soon. GETTY IMAGES

With spring training games occasionally on TV this time of year, hardcore baseball fans no doubt relish the chance to finally watch live baseball.

And inevitably fans who stick around for the later innings will watch players they have never heard of, who could never make the majors play mostly meaningless baseball. But all of these players have stories.

For the Phillies, pitching depth has been a problem, as their current five-man rotation is in flux without any mainstays aside from ace Aaron Nola. Several hurlers have fought and clawed their way to a spring training invite.

Enyel De Los Santos is a right-handed starter and the youngest non-roster invitee in camp. He's had quite the journey to Philadelphia, having dealt with two trades in three seasons after immigrating to the U.S. from San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic.

"I do feel like I am home," the 22-year-old said. "I know it is a new organization but they have been welcoming to me. It feels great to be part of this group. I hope we can all move up together. Some of these guys are very talented and it would be great to contribute and grow together in the organization."

De Los Santos was signed by the Mariners in 2015, traded to the Padres in 2017 and later traded to the Phillies in exchange for Freddy Galvis. He hopes he can finally settle down and work toward his big league dream after combining for a 24-11 record and 3.70 ERA in the minors.

"It's been really hard to be away from my family," the De Los Santos said through a translator, "that has been a big adjustment. I haven't spent a whole year with them, especially after switching organizations a couple times but it has also given me patience. I am an even more patient person now than I was before."

De Los Santos made his spring training debut Tuesday tossing 1.1 scoreless innings.

J.D. Hammer is another newly acquired Phils prospect, coming to town in exchange for Pat Neshek in a trade deadline deal with the Rockies last season. For him, being in Clearwater is the boost he's been waiting for as he strives to be a sleeper addition to the Phillies roster.

"It drives you," Hammer said. "You grow up working for this your whole life. Seeing there are opportunities in this system, I think this club will be great and I am hoping to be a part of that. I came from the fall league so you get little taste of how they live and the lifestyle and then you come here and see how close you are, the city is amazing. I love the fans and everyone is so passionate about it it gets you so excited and wanting to get here as soon as possible."

Not everyone was as lucky as Hammer and De Los Santos. A former JUCO pitcher, JoJo Romero also was vying to make an impact this season but did not get a spring training invite. But at just 21, he knows he has a lot of baseball left to play as he climbs the big league ladder. And he wouldn't want it any other way.

"That's what makes it the best sport ever," Romero, a fifth rounder who went 10-3 with a 2.16 ERA last season said. "There are so many different levels, eight sometimes nine for an organization. Having to constantly compete it helps make you a better person. It makes you disciplined and ultimately brings out the competitive drive and that's what helps people take off and become superstars."

Several players took off last season from the minors, like Nick Williams, J.P. Crawford, Tom Eshelman and Jorge Alfaro. Teammates in Double or Triple-A could get jealous, but the Phillies have a team mentality and know that when a player gets the call to 'The Show' they deserve it.

"They work hard to achieve their dream and I feel very good when their dream comes true," Franklyn Kilome, one of Philly's top pitching prospects said. Kilome has already made his Grapefruit League debut, but walked two and allowed a run in his first inning. "Thats what I am looking for — its what everyone is looking for. It makes me work hard."

Phillies fall in Clearwater

The results don't matter but the performances do.

Which gave Phillies coaches and scouts a mix of good and bad in a 11-6 loss to the Tigers in Grapefruit League play Tuesday.

Jerad Eickhoff allowed three runs in three innings but the Phils closed a 9-0 gap with a six-run fourth inning.

Rhys Hoskins blasted a homer and Roman Quinn hit a three-run bomb in the loss.

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3 Things for Eagles

The Eagles will be closely observing top linebackers Rashaan Evans (above) and Leighton Vander Esh (bottom right). ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

The NFL combine has a different importance for the Eagles after their Super Bowl campaign in 2017-18.

LUKE MILLER
sports@metro.us

The NFL combine kicked off Tuesday, and the workouts that will draw most of the attention begin Friday. Dreaming about athletic prospects might come naturally, but the 2018 NFL Draft is unfamiliar territory for Eagles fans.

The 32nd pick has never come Philadelphia's way by virtue of winning the Super Bowl, and the Eagles may have never had their reserves of talent so full entering an off-season. It sounds like a recipe for the Eagles to enjoy snapping up the highest rated player on their draft board that falls to them.

A couple reasons it may not be so simple: the Eagles don't have a second- or third-round pick. That's because they have Carson Wentz and Ronald Darby, which isn't so bad a reason. But it might make any offers they receive to trade down from their current perch all the more enticing.

The Eagles are well-stocked, but they're also well-strapped in cap space, and reinforcements will almost exclusively have to come from the draft this off-season. More picks would help that too. Here's a look at the position groups at the combine the Eagles could use the most help from:

For much more on the Eagles offseason, visit: metro.us

1 Offensive tackles

The Eagles offensive line bulldozed its way to Super Bowl victory this season, and did so without their most decorated player on the field. Jason Peters tore his ACL and MCL after seven games this season, after turning in a relatively healthy 2016. Halapoulivaati Vaitai filled in nicely, but the question of the offensive line post-Peters has been present in Philadelphia for awhile.

The consensus on the group of offensive linemen participating in Indy, particularly tackles, is less concrete and includes less obvious first round grades than in past years. This could mean virtually any of them could fall to the Eagles if teams don't take a liking. On the other hand, Notre Dame guard Quenton Nelson is shaping up to be the highest guard drafted since Brandon Scherff.

Oklahoma's Orlando Brown is sure to make a splash measuring in at the combine: he's currently listed at 6-foot-8 and 360 pounds. But how a man of his size moves will be of even more interest to the Eagles. Staying in the Big XII, Texas' Connor Williams is hoping to show scouts he more closely resembles his 2016 season than his 2017 one. He only played in five games in the latter and saw his performance dip while dealing with a knee injury.

Ohio State's Jamarco Jones might be the best fit for what the Eagles are trying to do. N.C. State's Will Richardson is another player who might be available once the Eagles finally make it up to the podium a second time. His main job at the combine will be convincing teams he's past a pair of driving while intoxi-

fans to watch for at the NFL combine

cated suspensions.

From the same state, from North Carolina A&T, Brandon Parker is a four-year starter at tackle who may nevertheless be available late. His family and coaching background is rich in offensive line play, and his athleticism might get him moving up boards at the combine.

2 Linebackers

The Eagles linebackers were as resilient as anything in 2017, overcoming the loss of Jordan Hicks and Joe Walker. Most of the thanks for that sits at the feet of Nigel Bradham and Mychal Kendricks, but with the precarious cap situation it may prove impossible for both Bradham, who is out of contract, and Kendricks, whom the Eagles could free up $4.4 million by jettisoning, to remain.

With that harsh reality, and the similarly harsh one that Hicks, for all his production, has already missed 15 games in three seasons, linebacker could quickly become a legitimate need for the Eagles with the draft the best place to affordably address it. It's also a position that's often undervalued in the first round, which might just leave the Eagles with their pick of some talent at 32.

Boise State's Leighton Vander Esch had outstanding production in his lone season as a starter and saved his best moments for big games. With questions about his position skills and intangibles already answered, the stage is set for the combine to showcase his athleticism and potentially move him towards the top of the linebacker rankings.

From the other end of the country, Alabama's Rashaan Evans is another possibility already being mocked to the Eagles at the 32nd pick. He's the kind of aggressive player the Birds defense loves, and he too saved his best moments for the biggest stage in college football (four-and-a-half sacks in the playoffs during his career.)

3 Tight ends

And finally, tight end. The Eagles have had an embarrassment of riches at this position for a few seasons now, but in the aftermath of the Super Bowl that may be coming to an end. The word retirement is being bandied about for club legend Brent Celek. And, even if he doesn't hang them up, the Eagles will be hard pressed to prevent Celek becoming another cap casualty.

Trey Burton came all the way from undrafted free agent to throwing a touchdown pass in the Super Bowl, but another team is almost sure to offer him money and playing time the Eagles can't compete with. The Eagles will likely soon be without their biggest blocking band-aid and a receiving mismatch. They'd love to replace both with the same player, but so would 31 other teams in the NFL.

Towards the top of the tight end class, South Carolina's Hayden Hurst offers both blocking and receiving abilities at the position, but he comes with the caveat of already being a 25-year old player. Hurst has been drafted to Pennsylvania before — the Pirates took him in the 2012 draft as a pitcher. Already much further into his athletic prime than most players, Hurst will have to look the part at the combine.

The Eagles could also turn to the tight end factory that has served them well already with Zach Ertz. Stanford's Dalton Schultz might be the class of the blockers in this year's tight end group. His efforts can be seen in the season Heisman candidate Bryce Love had at tailback for the Cardinal. He has limited receiving production, but the build (6-foot-6) to be a threat. The combine will show if he has the rest of the traits.

A late option who definitely has the build: Mississippi State's Jordan Thomas. Thomas (6-foot-6, 280 pounds) has rare speed for his size and the athletic ability to play basketball and move around the field. He doesn't have production or experience to match these other traits. But he's one of the players who seems designed to turn heads at the combine.

2018 NFL Combine Schedule

Friday, March 2:
OL, RB, ST

Saturday, March 3:
QB, WR, TE

Sunday, March 4:
DL, LB

Monday, March 5:
DB

(all coverage of on-field workouts broadcast on NFL Network)

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How a Philadelphia business forced LeBron James to consider the Sixers

Three creative billboards outside Cleveland force LeBron James to consider playing for the Sixers next season.

EVAN MACY
evan.macy@metro.us

"By having to ask the question — is he serious about Philadelphia — it's forcing the conversation that the option is yes," Asher Raphael said. IMAGE COURTESY OF TWITTER.COM

Lebron James will be a free agent. If he doesn't stay in Cleveland — and signs seem to point to him not — he'll need a new home next season.

In a PR stunt that is as Philadelphia as it gets, executives at Power Home Remodeling, a company headquartered in Chester, PA, took out three billboards outside of Cleveland, imploring James to consider selecting the Sixers as his next home.

"When people talk about where LeBron was going to go, which has been a hot topic for a long time, Philly was always on the list but toward the bottom of the list," the company's co-CEO Asher Raphael said. "It's like everything else in Philly, at the bottom of lists, and it doesn't make sense. But it's not just that we have cap space, it would be the best team to join. He has the best chance of winning by coming here. The only reason people don't talk about that is it's Philadelphia."

The Sixers have a young core in All-Star starter Joel Embiid and likely Rookie of the Year Ben Simmons. They have the 2017 first overall pick Markelle Fultz working his way back onto the court, a collection of talented role players in Robert Covington, Dario Saric, T.J. McConnell and others, and as Raphael, an avid Sixers fan says, plenty of cap space.

James is friends with Simmons and the two share an agent. The move to Philly makes sense, and the billboards bring the potentiality of a James-Philadelphia marriage front and center.

"You can say it's a distraction. It's not. Not a distraction, it's actually very flattering," James said. "People in their respective city want me to play for them, I mean, that's cool, I think. That's dope."

James is 33 years old and has played in the NBA for 15 seasons. He's already logged more games than Michael Jordan and shows no signs of slowing down. A move to Philadelphia could allow him to reinvent himself as he gets older and avoid needing to jump to a Western Conference power like the Rockets or Warriors to compete.

Raphael says the stigma of losing in Philly is gone after the Eagles won Super Bowl LII. And he was elated by James' response to the billboards — which were created quickly and completely in house.

"I was not only relieved, I was impressed by his response," the 37-year-old CEO, known for his embrace of millennial ideas, said. "But I took from it is a couple things. One, it was meant as a compliment and it was classy and shows how much pressure he's been under for a really long time. It's not something he's foreign to. It was meant to be serious too, we want him to come play here. In my most optimistic opinion, he sees playing for the Sixers as a legit viable option."

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RTI International (RTI), a non-profit research organization, is recruiting people to participate in an opinion survey pretest. You will be asked questions about your preferences for possible Alopecia Areata (AA) treatments.

If you are 18 years of age or older and have been told by a doctor that you have AA, you may qualify.

The interview will take an hour, and you will be paid $125 if you are eligible and selected for the interview.

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• SSI
• SOCIAL SECURITY
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$ BUYING Diabetic Test Strips, Nicotine Patches/Gum PAYING up to $50/Box $

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We Pickup

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$1000

2005 TAURUS
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ONLY 100k Miles

$1999

2002 BONNEVILLE
LOADED, Lthr (No Rips), S/R
RIMS, GREAT Motor/Trans

$1999

1998 LEXUS GS 400
RIMS, Lthr, GREAT
Motor/Trans

$2222

2005 CHEVY EQUINOX
FLAWLESS, 85K
AWD, Lthr.

$2999

2007 SRX
LOADED, 90K
3 Row, TV

$5555

CALL/TEXT: 215-626-2124

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w/ or w/out title
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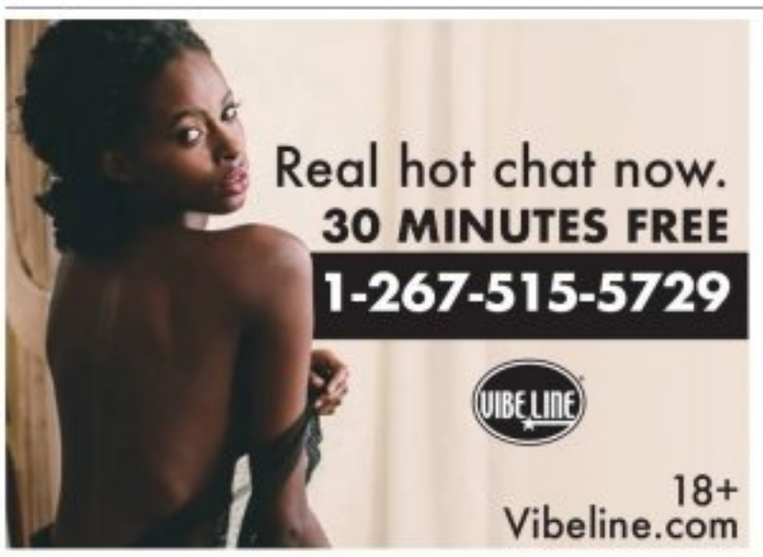

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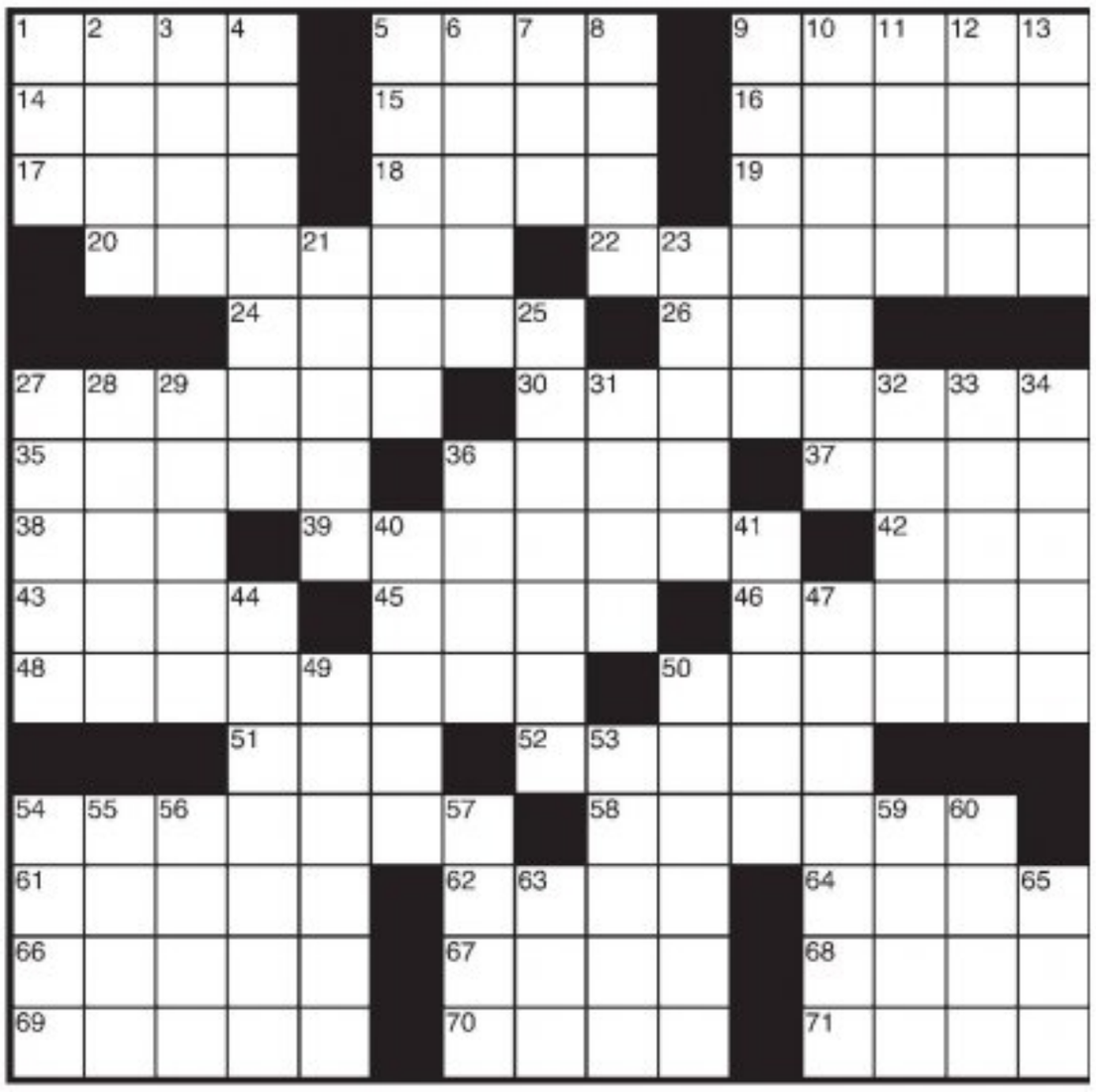
metro.us/games

metro.us/crossword

Across
1 Clean the deck
5 Feel sore
9 Stays near the shore
14 Whey-faced
15 Creme caramel
16 "Too many cooks ..." e.g.
17 Upper limbs
18 Strong, as venison
19 Type of eclipse
20 Chinese exercises (2 wds.)
22 On a bicycle
24 Suspense
26 Circle of flowers
27 Slide-show need
30 Cheer
35 Slack
36 Debatable
37 Airport exit
38 Non-flying bird
39 Ivories tickler
42 Upsilon preceder
43 Nasty remarks
45 Network
46 Smells awful
48 Sentimentality
50 Art categories
51 GI address
52 Long-plumed heron
54 Vulture's dinner
58 Kind of tire
61 Comic-strip queen
62 Pharaoh's god
64 Branch
66 Like a judge
67 Brad of the movies
68 Jacob's son
69 Exhilarating
70 Divers' milieus
71 Shangri-la

Down
1 Mineral spring
2 Toad feature
3 -- mater
4 Anyway
5 Crochet project
6 Prospector's filing
7 Smokehouse hanger
8 "Shepherd Moons" chanteuse
9 Squandered
10 Like some fans
11 Surrealist painter
12 Victorian oath
13 Desiccated
21 Go furtively
23 Ribs, slangily
25 Worry, plus
27 Sleighs or luges
28 Stand-up performer
29 Scratchy
31 Burglar's "key"
32 Dinner guest
33 Property marker
34 Kiddie-lit author
36 Shopping plaza
40 Ice hut
41 At bay
44 Felt a sharp, stinging pain
47 License
49 Drone's home
50 Endowments
53 The fabulous Garbo
54 Billfold contents
55 -- vera lotion
56 Ms. McEntire of music
57 Nods off
59 Impressed, plus
60 Not taped
63 Rail securer
65 Win at rummy



metro.us/sudoku

easy

7					4			
		6	8	5	2			
	3			9				6
	2		3			6		
1	8		5		9		7	3
		9			7		4	
8				7			6	
			1	8	5	7		
			9					1

hard

		4	8					
2			4		9	5		
	8				2	4	3	
1					8		2	
	9	3				7	6	
	7		5					4
	2	7	9				5	
		1	3		7			8
					5	6		

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Observation will help you process what you are up against. Seeing someone or something firsthand will encourage you to make adjustments that will protect you against loss.

Taurus Let others do as they please; if you are judgmental, you will be judged as well. Know your capabilities and only promise what's doable. Living up to your word is important.

Gemini Spend more time at home and with people who can help you get things done. Trusting someone's word will lead to disappointment. Get the facts firsthand.

Cancer Get along with your peers. There is strength in numbers, and if you can convince others to step up and make a difference, positive changes can be put into motion.

Leo Keep moving forward at lightning speed. What you accomplish will give you the edge when faced with opposition. Only take on what you can handle.

Virgo Put in the hours, physical labor and effort to get things done. Supervision may not be welcome, but it will help you maintain peace and avoid discord.

Libra You can make a difference if you put your skills and experience to good use. Participate in community events or home projects that will help improve your environment.

Scorpio Concentrate on getting things done to the best of your ability. Don't jeopardize your chance to advance by letting an emotional incident stifle your productivity.

Sagittarius You'll be easily misled by someone trying to manipulate you. Stay focused on what interests you, and make changes that will encourage a better standard of living.

Capricorn Uncertainty will prevail regarding partnerships. Be precise to avoid a misunderstanding. Impulsive decisions will lead to a disagreement and regret.

Aquarius Your involvement in a movement that can bring about change will make you feel good and bring you in contact with like-minded people.

Pisces Do whatever it takes to ensure that your responsibilities are completed on time. Refuse to let anyone interfere and deter you from reaching your goal. EUGENIA LAST

Yesterday's answers

Z	E	A	L	■	I	C	E	S	■	A	C	R	I	D
E	L	S	A	■	G	R	I	P	■	T	O	A	D	Y
T	O	P	B	A	N	A	N	A	■	L	E	V	E	E
A	P	E	■	S	I	B	■	S	T	A	R	E	S	■
■	E	N	A	C	T	S	■	M	A	R	C	■	■	■
■	■	■	R	O	E	■	L	O	N	G	E	S	T	■
S	H	I	F	T	■	B	U	D	G	E	■	H	U	T
A	I	R	S	■	P	A	R	I	S	■	G	U	M	S
O	F	A	■	P	A	N	I	C	■	C	R	I	S	P
■	I	N	S	I	P	I	D	■	W	H	O	■	■	■
■	■	■	A	C	E	S	■	F	O	U	G	H	T	■
■	T	H	W	A	R	T	■	R	O	T	■	O	W	E
B	R	A	Y	S	■	E	P	I	D	E	R	M	I	S
R	U	L	E	S	■	R	A	T	E	■	H	E	L	P
R	E	T	R	O	■	S	H	O	D	■	O	R	L	Y

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Healthy Adults • Kidney Disease
Liver Disease • Migraines
Neurogenic Orthostatic • Hypotension
Osteoarthritis • Schizoaffective
Schizophrenia

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